

## Overview

Asking students to begin a research can be a daunting task. What research is considered acceptable? How do I include evidence from my research to support my thesis? Where do I find my research? These are common questions from teenagers and adults alike. With the development of a variety of computer based applications, research has become a little more manageable for our digital natives. It has even become a little more “fun.” This article will focus on how Thurston High School Media Literacy classes used *Storify.com* to research a variety of questions regarding the marketing of alcohol and tobacco products and whether or not the presence of this type of advertising caused an increase in consumption of the products. *Storify.com* is a fairly simple application with the purpose of allowing users with an account to find and curate research using a variety of search options, including social networks.

## Rationale

As an elective teacher who tries to support school-wide efforts to increase the amount of reading and writing our students do throughout the year, I try to develop authentic learning opportunities for students to read and write without having it seem like meaningless busy work. Our media literacy course is a survey course that is designed to help our students become more critical consumers of the media. Within each unit we include relevant reading and writing assignments in order to increase literacy levels. For this research project, students were asked to pick from a variety of topics in order to focus their research. The students conducted their research in groups of two or three.

Some of the topics included:

- Provide evidence to support whether or not the advertising of fruit flavored liquors has increased or decreased alcohol use by teenagers and adults.
- Provide evidence to support whether or not professional baseball player’s use of chewing tobacco increases or decreases the use of chewing tobacco by children and teens.
- Provide evidence to support whether or not beer ads that air during the Super Bowl increase beer sales.

Upon completing their research in Storify, each student wrote a short 250-500 word essay citing three examples of their research and supporting their research with summary statements of their own-- something our students need to practice.

## Results

Students struggled during this research project and my colleague and I were completely okay with that. As they began their research, students were using search terms that were identical to the focus questions and they had trouble finding material to create their stories. Once they learned how to broaden their search terms, all students were successful. As a teacher, I was excited that students went beyond the typical Google search and found incredibly persuasive research in *Youtube* videos. One group who focused on chewing tobacco in professional sports found an incredibly persuasive video segment on *Youtube* featuring a broadcast journalist interviewing both a professional athlete as well as

a fan on their experience with chewing tobacco. I wish I had taken a picture of their faces when they showed me what they had found; the level of excitement was contagious! Subsequently, 57 out of 60 students in two classes turned in their essays.

#### Student Comments

*"I like using Storify because when you gather information for a project all resources and information you need from those websites are there in one page...If you need to share your information with many people you can publish it and people can see it so it is easier to for people to get it whether they're at school...or at home."* (Arlissa Brock, Thurston High School Student)

*"I liked using Storify because it was an easier way to research things. I think that it would be better to use this for projects for class instead of just using Google. Storify added not only Google but also things like Twitter, Facebook, Google Plus, etc. in one place instead of me going to different places to find the information that I need."* (Takia Andry, Thurston High School Student)

#### Moving Forward

I know that incorporating technology, Google Apps, and even the *forbidden* cell phone to engage students in literacy education, and it adds a level of excitement to the classroom assignments that has not been there in the past. With a 95% turn-in rate that included high quality writing from all students, I will certainly be incorporating apps like *Storify* in my regular classroom practices.